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## Brand as a part of the strategic development of higher education institution

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### Abstract

Branding of education has become an increasingly topical issue; therefore, managers of higher education institutions need to find additional opportunities to make education institutions more competitive and branded. The author considers the questions of necessity of formation and maintenance of an educational brand and its specificity. The article reflects the basic concepts of branding and the main components, which should be included in the educational brand (a unique system of brand signs, the product itself or educational service, the image of the university and the mission and values expressed in the form of promises any benefits). All of this in fact is a brand identity. The article concludes that branding helps education institutions to survive in the competitive market, thus forming the added value to the institution's image.

*Keywords:* Branding, higher education, educational brand, competitiveness

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### 1. Introduction

Currently the role of branding in higher education is significant. Universities compete for the attention of domestic and international students just as other service industries do, and issues of visibility, loyalty and reputation have become more apparent in recent years.

Due to the competition, higher education institutions need to emphasize their uniqueness, which brings up a new perspective for higher education – creating the institutional brand intentionally. The above-mentioned observation shows that branding has become a topical issue in education management and it provides a new export product for the country.

### 2. The Branding Concept

In times when people receive goods of similar quality and price range, brand often determines the choice of people [5]. Nevertheless, branding is a new area for research in higher education, which faces controversial opinions whether it can or cannot be applied. Although researchers stress the importance of brand management in education, there is little evidence of how to evaluate and measure its effectiveness [2].

One of the problems that have to be solved is that people consider branding only as a name of institutions, a logo or a slogan. This belief is continuously stated in glossaries and dictionaries. The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers" [1].

The author of this article proposes that brand is a subjective concept, which has to be developed in the minds of people, based on emotional interaction with internal and external audience [3]. According to K. Keller brand is "a set of associations that arise in the minds of consumers that add the perceived value to the product or service" [4].

Each brand of a higher education institution is strongly associated in the minds of consumers with specific benefits that determine their choice. Brand of an institution at the same time may include in the structure the brands of structural units (departments) and brands of teachers. Brand of a structural unit of a university is created by the brand of educational programs, brands of teachers involved in it and brands of departments included in the unit.

All these components use the basic brand of the university, supplementing it with attractive and significant for the target audience elements and associations.

The author believes that there exists clear and certain correlation between branding and successful institution management. When a student "buys" a service he/she believes that it is not only of high quality but it also ensures positive associations of an institution. These associations (e.g., of the institutions, value of the diploma, quality of education) have to be rooted in the beliefs of the society. This proves that not only high quality studies but also its branding is the next rational step for education institutions to compete between themselves and to remain or even increase the market share.

### **3. The essence of branding for the higher education institution**

It is worth noting that educational services have their own special peculiarities. And before talking about the process of formation of the brand of a university, it is necessary to understand what constitutes an educational services.

D. Shevchenko determines the educational service as "the process of getting a specific set of knowledge and practical methods of their application that can satisfy the needs of the individuals in their professional status and growth" [6].

Educational brand includes the following components.

Firstly, it is a unique and recognizable system of brand signs such as the name of the university, a graphic image (logo) and sound symbols.

Second, it is the product itself or educational service with all its inherent characteristics (quality of education, teaching staff, learning environment, etc.).

Third, it is certainly the image of the university as a set of characteristics, expectations, associations, perceived and attributed by the consumer and the community.

Fourth, it is the mission and values of the university expressed in the form of promises any benefits given by the owner of the brand to consumers of educational services.

All of this in fact is a brand identity. The essence of the brand in this case can be expressed in the mission of the university.

It should be remembered that the most important goal of brand building is the ability to differentiate the product, give the originality to the proposal. For university it means that the potential and real consumers should fully feel the differences of educational services of the university from similar proposals of competing universities.

Thus, the building of the educational brand, of course, gives to university a huge number of advantages.

It is necessary to take into account one more feature: the formation of the educational brand in contrast to commodity brand requires more time (however, it is typical for corporate brands). Obviously, for assessing the quality of specialist training it is necessary to graduate students, and it takes 4-5 years. Precisely because of this, universities, which are the undisputed brands, have a long history and their own traditions.

However, this does not mean that relatively “young” universities cannot become brands. Even at an early stage of its existence, they can be brand-oriented and focus their efforts on the formation of stable positions among consumers. Of course, it may take some time, however, if this is achieved, it will be much more difficult to destroy the established image. Therefore, efforts spent on the creation of brand will give returns over a long period, and all the money will be refunded. All of this in fact is the formation of the reputation of the university.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In the conclusion it has to be stated that it is not an easy task to create a successful institutional brand; it cannot be bought as it shaped in people`s minds and each institution has its own aims and strategy, strengths and weaknesses. Brand is unique and developed with the help of mental process. It is created slowly and it changes slowly. One of the options is to consider the institution alive because it can communicate with the world via the help of Public Relation. Managers need to keep in mind their key role in brand development, i.e. to express the values and ensure easily perceptible information for the society, which is creative and original.

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